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DEPARTMENT FOR DS/IP/RD/SCA, DS/DSS/ITA AND SA/INS

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TAGS: [ASEC](#) [CASC](#) [PTER](#)
SUBJECT: EMBASSY COLOMBO EAC MEETING 05/21/2008

REF: A. COLOMBO 475
[1](#)B. RSO DS SPOT REPORT DATED 05/16/2008

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: AmEmbassy Colombo convened an Emergency Action Committee (EAC) meeting on May 21, 2008. The EAC discussed post's security posture in light of the most recent bombing incident in Colombo (refs A and B). The EAC recommended that Embassy personnel use routes that minimize exposure to likely LTTE targets and that personnel traveling to Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) facilities for business purposes use armored vehicles (AVs) whenever possible. The EAC recommended that agencies that do not currently provide AVs and that do not use post's motorpool should make every effort to provide AVs for their personnel. The EAC also considered the security situation in the East, following the recent Provincial Council elections. End summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) On Friday, May 16, 2008, a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device, triggered by a suicide bomber, targeted a bus carrying police officers (refs A and B). The attack occurred on Lotus Road, in the Fort district of Colombo, near the Hilton Hotel. A Presidential Management Fellow (hereafter referred to as an intern), on temporary assignment with post's Political Section, passed through the area moments before the attack occurred. The intern heard the blast, saw debris falling down onto the street and observed victims fleeing the scene. She was the first person to report the incident to the Embassy. Fortunately, neither she nor any other American citizens sustained injuries. The method of attack, by a suicide bomber aboard an explosive-laden motorcycle, bore the mark of the LTTE. The blast killed 11 people and injured close to 90 others.

[1](#)3. (SBU) On May 21, 2008, AmEmbassy Colombo convened an EAC meeting. (Note: The EAC met after the long Vasak holiday weekend following the Friday blast.) Present for the meeting were the Ambassador, DCM, RSO, MED, MGT, IBB, RAO, POL, CON, PD, ECON, USAID, CSI, and MSG. The agenda items for the meeting were:

--Measures to take to enhance post's security posture in light of the most recent attack; and

--The security situation in the Eastern Province after elections for the new Provincial Council and the selection of TMVP leader "Pillaiyan" as Chief Minister for the Eastern Province.

[1](#)4. (SBU) RSO observed that the main threat to USG personnel remains being in proximity to an LTTE attack on a principal target (high-profile GSL personnel or facility) - that is, the threat remains "being in the wrong place at the wrong time." The May 16 incident highlighted that threat. The EAC reviewed available information and agreed that, while there have been some incidents in the Fort district, attacks have also occurred in several other areas of greater Colombo. Therefore, it is difficult to determine if any one area is more dangerous than another location. However, the EAC

observed that the Fort contains a number of GSL facilities which are potential LTTE targets. Accordingly, the EAC recommended the following measures:

--Whenever possible, Mission personnel should opt for routes that will minimize the likelihood of being in proximity to a GSL facility or similar potential LTTE target.

--Post will maximize the use of armored vehicles (AVs) during working hours, particularly when personnel attend meetings at GSL facilities.

--The EAC noted that some agencies provide AVs, while other agencies do not. The EAC concurred that the random nature of the attacks in Colombo presents a strong argument for the use of AVs, and recommended that all agencies make every effort to provide AVs for their employees' use for business purposes.

15. (SBU) The EAC asked the RSO to do further research regarding the timing and location of attacks over the last two years. This information will assist the EAC in determining if post should limit travel to any particular area of the city or increase AV use during non-business hours (such as for trips to and from the airport). The EAC will meet and consider further recommendations upon review of the RSO's report.

16. (SBU) The EAC then took up the issue of the security situation in the Eastern Province following the recent Provincial Council elections and the naming of Sivanesanathurai Chandrakanthan ("Pillaiyan") as Chief Minister on May 16. There had been suggestions that communal violence would erupt between the Tamil and Muslim populations in the East if Pillaiyan obtained the Chief Minister position. However, to date, there have been no major outbreaks of violence. Therefore, the EAC did not recommend any revisions to Post's restricted travel policy. The RSO, DAO and POL will continue to monitor the security situation in the East and will closely review requests to travel there. The EAC recommended that agencies not currently using AVs for travel to the East should consider revising their policies and use LAVs whenever possible.

17. (U) Post will continue to monitor the security environment and will report further developments by septel. POC for this message is RSO Michael V. Perkins, who may be contacted at 94.11.249.8885, 94.11.249.8888 (MSG Post 1 after regular business hours), or via the classified and unclassified email systems.
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